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ABSTRACT

The study investigated reasons why 11th-grade students decided not to enroll in a vocational curriculum and who influenced their decision. The population studied was all nonvocational 11th-grade students in the Southwest Ohio Region Personnel Development Center during the 1987-88 school year. Five schools were randomly selected from the population, resulting in 633 nonvocational 11th-graders. Two of the schools were in urban areas, and three were in rural areas; the socioeconomic status of the schools was similar. Students were about 80 percent white, 17 percent black, and 3 percent other races, and about half male and half female. Students completed questionnaires; a random sample of 15 of their parents were interviewed by telephone. The study showed that the most often cited reason students did not enroll in vocational education was that they wanted to go to college and that vocational education would neither prepare them for college nor offer the right graduation credits. Students also had a negative image of vocational education courses and vocational students. The study also found that mothers/female guardians, followed by friends, were the most important influences on student curriculum choice. The study concluded that vocational education should seek ways to become more integrated with the academic curriculum in order to offer college-bound students credits for college. It also suggested marketing the vocational curriculum to mothers. (KC)

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REASONS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE NOT ENROLLING IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND PEOPLE INFLUENCING STUDENTS' DECISIONS

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OBJECTIVES

This study investigated reasons why 11th grade students decided not to enroll into a vocational curriculum. Given that students can self-select a curriculum for their high school years, one needs to look at the reasons for not selecting vocational education.

Students frequently consult other people when making decisions. This study also set out to determine who influenced high school students when they were making their decision to select a curriculum. Specifically, this research looked at who influenced a student to decide not to enroll in a vocational education curriculum. The extent of influence was also investigated.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In Ohio, there has been a steady decline in secondary vocational enrollment. From 1979 to 1987 the number of students enrolled dropped 21%. Programs experiencing the decline include: Agricultural Education, Marketing Education, Health Education, Home Economics, Business Education, and Trade and Industry Education.

Studies show that vocational education can offer its graduates advantages over graduates in a general curriculum (Desy, Mertens, & Gardner, 1984). Ghazalah (1987) found that vocational education graduates earn a higher immediate income and experience fewer days of unemployment than graduates of the general population.

Ginzberg (1951) believed that career development was an ongoing, continuous process. He also believed that this process involved choices. The Decision Making Process steps, outlined by Stufflebeam, Foley, Gephart, Guba, Hammond, Merriman and Provus (1971) involve the following:

1. Become aware that a decision is needed.
2. Design the decision situation
3. Choose among alternatives.
4. Act upon the chosen alternative.

The choice to enter into vocational education is a choice toward choosing a career.

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Lam (1982) classified barriers that influence a student's decision not to enroll in vocational education. This classification system divides the reasons into three main categories. The first category is intrapersonal reasons which includes: attitudes, perceptions, images, motivation, career maturity and value systems. The second category is immediate external reasons, which includes two subcategories: school factors (distance to

schools, friends, extracurricular activities) and influence of others (friends, parents, counselors, neighbors, teachers and other relatives). The final category is remote external reasons which include socioeconomic status, parental income and parental educational levels.

An individual is less likely to express a preference and more likely to express a rejection for an activity or field of study that has consistently negatively expressed opinions from a valued person. If a valued person has a negative view of an activity, students are less likely to become involved in that activity.

Definitions

A vocational student is defined as a student enrolled in a vocational curriculum for a considerable proportion of time. The average vocational education concentrators will have spent about 10% of their time in vocational courses. Students who are concentrators average 6.3 Carnegie Units of vocational course work upon graduation from high school. They do not necessarily use all electable credits in the vocational specialty, but use a substantial majority of them. The vocational, 11th grade student will have been enrolled in at least two continuous years in a vocational specialty program area. They may have accumulated 2-2.5 Carnegie Units by the 11th grade.

A college preparatory student (academic) is one who is taking coursework to prepare to enter into a four-year college. Students in a general curriculum are taking course work of a general nature in order to earn enough credits for graduation.

METHODS

This study was developed as a descriptive survey research design. A clustering sample technique was employed. The population used was all nonvocational 11th-grade students in the Southwest Ohio Region Personnel Development Center during the 1987-88 school year. Five schools were randomly selected from the population. The sample was composed of 633 11th-grade, nonvocational students.

Since only nonvocational students were needed for the study, procedures were developed to sort the students by curriculum choice. Guidance counselors sorted the students according to curriculum choice (vocational, academic, general) based upon an established set of guidelines. Teachers present on the day of data collection also verified the sorting.

A student questionnaire was developed by the researcher following the principles outlined by Dillman (1978). A review of the literature and research and interviews with educators formed the basis for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was field tested and pilot tested. Construct validity was established by two panels of experts made up of university faculty in Agricultural Education and Psychology, and vocational researchers. Test-retest procedures were used to determine coefficients of stability for important questionnaire items. Pearson product moment coefficients ranged from .42 to 1.00. Cronbach's alpha was evaluated to determine the reliability of the summated scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .63 to .83. In the Spring of 1988, questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher and research assistants. All completed questionnaires were coded and entered into a personal computer for data analysis.

A random sample of 15 parents was interviewed by telephone in order to determine their perceptions of why their son/daughter did not enroll in a vocational program. They were also asked to give their opinion on who influenced students in selecting a high school curriculum. This qualitative data was collected from the interviews and a triangulation effort was made to explore the quantitative data from the student questionnaires. Efforts were made to merge the two types of data in order to get an overview of reasons students are not enrolling into vocational education. Demographic data was also collected for each of the five schools in the study for descriptive purposes.

RESULTS

Description of the Sample

Three of the schools selected are in rural school districts while two are serving an urban population. Of the 633 students in the sample, 53% are female and 47% are male. Eighty percent are White (Caucasian), 17% are Black and 3% are in other races. Sixty percent of the sample are enrolled in an academic curriculum, while 40% are enrolled in a general curriculum. Student socioeconomic status is comparable at each of the five schools.

Reasons for Not Enrolling in Vocational Education

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. One of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire asked students to list their reasons for not enrolling in vocational education. There were 762 responses that were sorted into the following 18 categories.

Categories (rank order)

1. It did not have what I'm interested in. (28%)
2. I want to go to college. (25%)
3. Vocational education does not meet college requirements. (8.5%)
4. There were scheduling problems. (8%)
5. I did not want to change schools. (5%)
6. No reason. I never thought of it. (4%)
7. I have a poor image of vocational students. (3.5%)
8. I just did not want to go. (3%)
9. There was a lack of information about vocational education. (2.4%)
10. Vocational education classes are too easy and/or not challenging. (2%)
11. Vocational education is too difficult. (2%)
12. I plan to attend vocational education. (2%)
13. Vocational education narrows my career choices. (1.5%)
14. My parents advised me against enrolling in vocational education. (1.5%)
15. I have a poor image of vocational schools. (1.4%)
16. My counselor advised me against enrolling in vocational education. (0.8%)
17. I should have enrolled in vocational education. (0.8%)
18. Vocational education is a waste of time. (0.6%)

Another portion of the questionnaire asked students to indicate the extent of agreement with 16 statements representing potential reasons for not enrolling in vocational education. Table 1 shows the mean scores and reasons in rank order. The scores were derived from a Likert scale ranging from 1-5. Responses were coded 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for ?, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree.

Table 1

Reasons for Not Enrolling in Vocational Education

Rank Order	Reasons	Mean
1.	I plan to go to college.	4.11
2.	I never thought of it.	3.32
3.	I did not want to become a member of a vocational youth organization.	3.24
4.	My image of the quality of vocational education.	3.11
5.	It would limit my career choice.	3.10
6.	Scheduling problems prevented me from enrolling.	2.76
7.	Comments I have heard from other students.	2.72
8.	My image of the quality of vocational teachers.	2.65
9.	The low ability of vocational students.	2.57
10.	Comment from other teachers.	2.52
11.	Associating with vocational students.	2.46
12.	Graduation requirements.	2.41
13.	Vocational students are problem students.	2.32
14.	Vocational courses were never presented as an option.	2.24
15.	Cost prohibitive.	2.12
16.	Courses are too difficult.	1.69

The most popular reason for not enrolling in vocational education was that the student planned to go to college. The least popular was that courses were too difficult.

Reasons for Not Enrolling in Joint Vocational Schools

Additionally, students were asked to indicate the extent of agreement with 11 statements representing potential reasons for not enrolling in joint vocational schools (career centers). Table 2 shows the mean scores and reasons in rank order. The scores were derived from a Likert scale ranging from 1-5. Responses were coded 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (?), 2 (disagree), 1 (strongly disagree).

The most popular reason for not enrolling in joint vocational schools was that the students felt that their current (home) school will better prepare them for college.

Table 2

Reasons for Not Enrolling in a Vocational School (JVS)

Rank Order	Reasons	Mean
1.	This school will better prepare me for college.	3.76
2.	I just never thought about attending.	3.46
3.	Did not offer programs I wanted to take.	3.24
4.	I would not be able to participate in extracurricular activities in my home school.	3.04
5.	The image of the JVS in my community.	3.00
6.	Because I would have to go to the JVS.	2.88
7.	Associating with students from the vocational school.	2.83
8.	I would not be able to participate in sports in my home school.	2.70
9.	I was too loyal to this school.	2.63
10.	School dismisses too late in the day.	2.38
11.	Too difficult to get to the JVS every day.	2.12

Influencers

The questionnaire also asked students to indicate who most influenced them to not enroll in vocational education. Students were asked to indicate by responding "yes" or "no" if they had discussed, with the nine people listed, their decision to not enroll in vocational education. For those items checked "yes," they were to indicate the extent of influence. Table 3 indicates that the mother/female guardian was the most influential person. Forty-six percent of the students indicated that she was influential. Thirty-five percent indicated that the extent of influence was strong.

Table 3

Influencers on Enrolling in Vocational Education

Rank Order	People	f	% Yes	Extent of Influence None	Mild	Strong
1.	Mother/Female Guardian	283	46%	32%	33%	35%
2.	Friend	274	44%	34%	45%	21%
3.	Counselor	241	39%	34%	37%	29%
4.	Father/Male Guardian	236	38%	30%	37%	33%
5.	Brother/Sister	135	22%	29%	36%	35%
6.	Teacher	126	20%	19%	54%	27%
7.	Other Relative	109	18%	22%	44%	34%
8.	Boy/Girl/Friend	102	17%	35%	43%	22%
9.	Athletic Coach	32	5%	19%	32%	49%

When asked who most influenced them to make a decision to enroll in a joint vocational school, the students again selected their mother/female guardian. Their friends were ranked second as influencers.

Parent interviews confirm the results received on the student questionnaire. Of the 15 parents interviewed, 7 believed they had a great influence on their son/daughter in selecting a high school curriculum. Besides parental influence, they cited teachers, friends, other family members and counselors as people who influence students to select their curriculums.

When parents were asked for reasons their son/daughter decided not to enroll in vocational curriculum, the following responses were given.

# Parents Responding	Reasons
5	Because he/she is going to college.
4	I do not know.
1	They had nothing that interested him.
1	Her friends were not in vocational classes.
1	He did not want to leave his home school.
1	He is very smart and strong minded.
1	Attitude of kids who take vocational classes.
1	He never gave reason why.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings section can only be generalized to the population. Readers are cautioned not to generalize to other populations. What the study shows is that students elect not to enroll into vocational curriculums for a variety of reasons. The most popular reason is that students who plan to go on to college feel that vocational education does not prepare them. They also feel that there is nothing interesting being offered. There were also negative images of vocational education that were cited as reasons to not enroll. Mothers/female guardians are the most influential people in a student's life when deciding not to enroll in a vocational curriculum. Parents agreed that they were influential people in their son/daughter's lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrators must recognize the direct clash between the college preparatory and the vocational curriculum. They need to blend the two curriculums in order to allow the college preparatory student an opportunity to enroll in vocational programs without sacrificing courses needed to meet college requirements. Vocational courses could be developed to allow the college preparatory student to enroll for enrichment or exploratory purposes.

New programs need to be developed and marketed that meet the interests of students. These needs may be based on their college preparation courses or on occupational goals. Marketing studies need to be conducted in order to determine the needs of the students.

Vocational educators need to market programs to mothers, as well as to students. They are influential in helping students decide upon a high school curriculum.

Marketing efforts should be increased toward sharing "success stories" of vocational graduates who have gone to college. More people need to be made aware of articulation agreements between vocational schools and post-secondary technical schools or universities.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

In order to market vocational education one needs to know the barriers to enrolling. The reasons one gives for not enrolling can serve to evaluate our programs. If vocational education is to survive it must serve the needs of its clientele. We must listen to those who have rejected us and modify our programs and improve our image.

In order to impact upon recruitment efforts it is helpful to know who most influences students' decisions. Efforts can be targeted to the influencers and to the students in order to encourage their support and enrollment in our programs.

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